

# AGING I&R/A TIPS

## Tip Sheet 3

National Aging Information & Referral Support Center

### COMMUNICATING WITH PEOPLE WHO HAVE ALZHEIMER'S OR OTHER DEMENTIA

*"The greatest attributes anyone can have are  
(1) a positive attitude & (2) a sense of humor"*

—Jonathan Franzen (*"My Father's Brain"*)

Many people in the early to middle stages of Alzheimer's still want to be involved in making the decisions that affect their life. Communicating with someone who has Alzheimer's or other dementia requires sensitivity, respect, and understanding.

#### Effective Communication Techniques

- Identify yourself and call the person by name.
- Be a good listener. Give individuals time to talk about and describe what they want or need. Let them know you are listening and trying to understand.
- Limit distracting background noises, such as other conversations.
- Assist the person with orientation to time and place, as needed.
- Use nouns. Try to avoid using pronouns. Identify people, places, and things by name.
- Speak slowly and distinctly. A lower pitch is more calming.
- Carefully choose simple, short, adult-level words. Avoid using slang, jargon, and acronyms.

- When things stop making sense, don't correct. Listen and try to find meaning in what is being said.
- Use concrete statements. Avoid abstractions. For example: "Your wife Millie will pick you up at North Shore Center at 3:00 p.m. today, rather than, "She will be there in a little while."
- Ask one question at a time. Allow the individual time to process what was said. Don't try to finish his or her sentences.
- Use repetition. Repeat what was said if clarification is needed.

SOURCE: Adapted from *General Guidelines for Enhancing Communication*, Alzheimer's Association, New York City Chapter.

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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